

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾ Change Term

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[Add to Course Planner](#)Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 11 THROUGH 15 OF 148** next 5 > >|

its fine, if you don't want to have to attend every class. Lectures can be good, if you go.

don't take this course - you have to teach yourself everything you need to know for the exams. the exams seem like they are purposely designed to trick you. i didn't learn anything about congress except that professor platt thinks it sucks.

Take-home exams. They're tough, a lot tougher than previous years, but it's about four hours of work every three weeks. Pretty chill.

I really enjoyed this class and feel like I came away with an enhanced knowledge of our Congress and a greater sense of the problems and reasons for these problems. I loved lectures -- Professor Platt is engaging and funny and very skilled. I think that many people say it's easy, but the take-home exams are actually pretty tricky if you haven't done the readings or attended lecture.

This class was not at all what I expected it to be. It was too fast-paced to be considered an actual introductory course, and I felt that many of the exam questions were designed to trick you rather than test your understanding of the material. I also thought that the TF system negatively affected this course.

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 11 THROUGH 15 OF 148** next 5 > >|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 16 THROUGH 20 OF 148

next 5 >

>

Worst class I've taken at Harvard, bar none (I'm a second semester senior). Be prepared to teach yourself everything by reading a lot of government journal papers because the lectures are usually not related to anything you'd be tested. Sections were more helpful than lectures, but not by much. The exams were challenging only because we were tested on things that weren't covered in class. Basically a waste of time.

This course is terrible. The exams don't really relate to class, and the grading is draconian. Platt is a very humorous, intelligent lecturer, and I would recommend listening to him, just not in the context of this horrible class.

It's nice having take-home midterms, but they were generally kind of a big time commitment. Definitely go to sections, at least to learn about how to read a political science article. I had never done that before, so it was useful to learn the important facets of an article without reading every single word - which is what I was doing and it was taking forever so I got really behind on the reading.

Although the Q evaluations may make this class seem easy, it was not. The class is not very organized, and lacks cohesion. Your grade is completely dependent on the section teaching fellow you are designated and the way he grades. I do not recommend this class, as the amount of work you put in, sometimes doesn't reflect on the grade you obtain.

It is a tricky class because of how it is presented and taught and what is expected for exams.

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 21 THROUGH 25 OF 148

next 5 >

>

If you want to get something out of it, go to section and class. Not necessary though

The class is pretty easy but it's not the most fun or rewarding.

It used to be easy but Platt made the exams really hard and it is not worth the headache you will have for four weekend during the semester when you have to search through obscure readings to find answers to poorly constructed questions. If you want an easy gov class this is not it!

Do not take this class

Definitely not "the easiest class at Harvard" anymore. I was disappointed that I didn't learn more. I wish we had focused more on current events.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 21 THROUGH 25 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
Summary

Instructor
Eval. Summary

View Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 26 THROUGH 30 OF 148** next 5 > >|

This class is able to give you a broad overview of Congress but it is not very well organized sometimes.

It seems as though the exams were made much more difficult this year. If your section isn't helpful, you should do the readings before taking exams.

The exams are absolutely absurd, and don't match the material covered in the lecture at all. You don't actually comprehend anything taught in lecture unless you spend a lot of time doing research and reading on your own...but even so, I couldn't exactly understand much because I have never been really exposed to government. Don't take the class if you haven't, and are trying to get an A in a class.

In the past this class probably was very easy. The current state of it is clearly a response to former Q scores that made it seem like this was a give-me class. It is not longer a fourth class and until some serious rearrangements are made, it's not even worth taking as a government concentrator. The reactionary stance this class took really shot it over the edge, making it completely unmediated and pointless.

This class was ridiculous. So poorly organized and misleading in its workload. Professor Platt was almost unfair in the specificity of the questions he asked on the exams and there was a clear disconnect between the prof and his tfs. This was hugely problematic. I am a senior government concentrator and this was perhaps the worst class I have ever taken both in the government department and at Harvard in general.

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 26 THROUGH 30 OF 148** next 5 > >|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 31 THROUGH 35 OF 148** next 5 > >|

If you are truly interested in the mechanics of working through a spatial model maybe this is the class for you but having thought this was a historical presentation of what Congress is about about the cogs of that system I was horribly mistaken.

This class is super unorganized. Don't take it just because you think it will be an easy A. It really isn't. Just because there are 4 take home exams doesn't mean that they will be easy. Even with the lectures and the readings, the exams are such a pain. It is a waste of time, take another gov class.

Interesting class, Platt was great. Don't take assuming it's an easy A as the course was changed from the past and most people did poorly.

This is a fantastic course that enables students to develop a thorough knowledge of the United States' Congress. However, this course is a lot of hard work.

Tests in the class have gotten more difficult, and are given over weekends. If you are a spring athlete be careful with this choice, because time allotment for tests is not extended even if you have a rigorous athletic schedule on that particular weekend.

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 31 THROUGH 35 OF 148** next 5 > >|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 36 THROUGH 40 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

unless you need to take it, don't take it.

Complete waste of time but relatively easy A- or A with minimal work. Overall, a good fourth class if you have a lot of other stuff going on during the semester.

I really liked the class. Prof. Platt is great and keeps lectures interesting. You'll get out of the class the amount of work that you put in. I wish I had actually done the readings because I feel like I would have really learned something and enjoyed the class much more.

Be on top of your readings, and even if you are, be warned that the exams are tough

Having completed the class, i now know many of the intricacies around Congress, but still do not understand the basics. The class is based entirely on four take-home exams that all look for very specific details from the readings, and do not focus on actually how congress works. I would certainly not take this class had i known this was the format, and i do not recommend it.

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 36 THROUGH 40 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 41 THROUGH 45 OF 148

next 5 >

>

It's not as easy as everyone says it it is

This course has the potential to be an extraordinary class. However, as of now it isn't the greatest course. Most readings are not all that engaging and section is not mandatory so very little good discussion takes place.

they made it really hard and unfair this year. only take it if they change it back to the old way

Professor Platt is an entertaining lecturer and this is a good intro gov course. Exams were made more difficult last year, with more specific information required (i.e. do the reading) to accurately answer each question on the exam.

Very basic. Read Wikipedia instead.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 41 THROUGH 45 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Print Page](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 46 THROUGH 50 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

The new exam format is pretty tough. Questions aren't worded very well.

This course is brutal. Literally went from being easy last year to just being plain old confusing. Not enough time spent on the important stuff and issues I really wished I knew about.

Very easy, but not too rewarding. I think this class needs mandatory section and reading quizzes to incentivize participation. There needs to be some motivation to wake up and actually go to class.

This class is pretty simple and easy but don't take it just for the sake of getting an "easy A". Your time here at Harvard is limited and if you aren't actually interested in Congress....don't take this class then.

don't take this course

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 46 THROUGH 50 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 51 THROUGH 55 OF 148

next 5 >

>

Professor Platt is an awesome lecturer and you will learn a lot!!

It's not a gem. Do not take it unless you know Congress inside and out.

Do all of the readings and go to lecture or else tests will be impossible.

They made this class harder this year. The exams were time-consuming and covered material that was often not mentioned or explained well in class. I went to class every day and still struggled on the exams.

There's no work besides the four take home exams, but you should go to lecture or you're screwed.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 51 THROUGH 55 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 56 THROUGH 60 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

Platt is a great lecturer however the exams are extremely difficult and do not reflect the material from lecture. This class was harder than Gov 20.

Unless you are a very visual learner this is one to avoid: interesting and important subject matter but let down by poorly designed exams that were worth 25% of the grade each!

Do not take this course.

Even if you stay on top of the material, you'll be overwhelmed by the exams.

Don't take this class.

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 56 THROUGH 60 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 61 THROUGH 65 OF 148

next 5 >

>

Pretty manageable class, the lectures were fun but not necessary to attend. The exams this year were much more tedious than last years

The class is relatively easy. Just make sure to not fall behind on the readings!!

Not the gem it used to be

Don't believe the teacher when he tells you that he gives everyone A's

The exams which are the only grades in the course are very difficult and in-depth.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 61 THROUGH 65 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Print Page](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES **66** THROUGH **70** OF **148**

next 5 >

>

I would say that the exams are graded out of 50 which makes it very difficult to receive proper credit, and I would say that there is a great deal of grade discrepancy amongst the TFs.

This class was harder than it was in previous years. It's format this year was 4 take home midterms and could definitely be taken as a 5th class or an easy class on top of other classes. However, if you do not go to lecture or don't try at all, it will not be as you think. If you go to lecture, you will definitely learn something about Congress and most of the take homes will be straightforward. If you do not go to lecture/skip a few, then you will be faced with having to go through a ton of readings and getting lecture notes. Ultimately, this class can be taken as four days of work over the semester. The takehomes were given over a weekend. Most people started Sunday night, hated it, complained about it, and finished by the deadline and got A's/A-'s. Having said that... the class is almost easier if you go to most lectures. Platt is pretty interesting and makes lectures funny. Ultimately. Go to lecture. The class will be straightforward. Outside of lecture, you will have no work. The readings can all be done when doing the take homes.

It is a useful class especially for Gov concentrators. The tests are not easy, but there isn't too much work outside of that besides for reading so it is very manageable.

grading is too arbitrary, assignments are difficult and not necessarily based off what you learn in class/section

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 71 THROUGH 75 OF 148** next 5 > >|

Informative course that helps you understand the inner working of Congress.

This class is not the most engaging, but in the end you do leave with a general knowledge of how Congress works. Most of the learning comes through doing the exams, which are fairly unpredictable. Overall I was unsatisfied with grades I received and the hours I put into the 4 exams.


tough class

The lectures: easy. The sections: easy. The exams: extremely difficult and your entire grade is based on them.

This course confirmed that it is not enough to look at the evaluations of past years--there were many changes made to this course, which mislead many of the students who chose to take it. This resulted in a lot of stress and unmanageable work. The grade differentials based on TFs is also quite an issue, and leaves a lot up to the objectivity of each individual TF.

|< < prev 5 **SHOWING RESPONSES 71 THROUGH 75 OF 148** next 5 > >|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012  [Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 76 THROUGH 80 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

The exams were made to be confusing.

The exams are a pain to do and grading can be somewhat arbitrary seeming on the essay portions. Overall the class is advertised as easy but there are better options. Take it only if you are interested in government or politics.

This course is extremely difficult without being at all informative. I wouldn't recommend it because I don't think that it even fulfills its own stated goals of giving the student a good understanding of the workings of congress.

Taking this class was a mistake. Professor Platt has little to no regard for his students or their grades. He was unhelpful, condescending, and borderline rude at office hours. The lectures made very few actual points, and sometimes they flat out did not make much sense. The content seemed thrown together in a random order, and professor Platt was very redundant. I am not prepared to say that my knowledge of Congress grew from this class in any major way, which is a shame because I am interested in government. This class was considered easy in the past, and this year the course changed dramatically - ie very difficult midterms.

The exams were often about concepts out of the dense readings not lecture itself- which was not useful in teaching me anything substantive about American government.

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 76 THROUGH 80 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Print Page

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 81 THROUGH 85 OF 148

next 5 >

>

This course is now difficult. The assignments are highly technical, and there is little clarification about what is expected. Prof Platt is largely indifferent to the student experience. This class is clearly not his priority.

take it, it stimulates interest.

class is almost as chaotic as congress itself

The exams are poorly written and confusing, just going to lecture does not ensure that you will be ready to take the exams

False advertisement. The professor billed this as an easy class and then proceeded to make it very difficult.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 81 THROUGH 85 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES **86** THROUGH **90** OF **148**

next 5 >

>

I took this class because I thought it was easy but it is not. Also, the material is very dry so unless you are interested in nitty gritty political science this is not the course for you.

Poorly designed course with ineffective lectures and convoluted exams.

I would tell future students who genuinely want to learn about Congress in a stimulating way not to take this course. If you are a student looking for a low time commitment course, this is a good option (optional section, you dont need to go to lectures to do the exams, etc).

This was the worst class I have ever taken at Harvard; lectures were very basic and could be summarized in 2 sentences; no one ever showed up to sections because they were optional (which really discouraged those who did show up); HUGE grade disparities and section effectiveness between TFs (some went through readings while others did not, and some gave really high grades while others did not); grading scheme is terrible (the point system meant that if you did poorly on the first exam, you are screwed for an A); professor is unwilling to accommodate grade disparities between TFs, or allow section changes after allowing other people to switch; overall, this class was a waste of time (and my GPA)

I would not recommend this class to anyone. I took this class after reading reviews from previous years, and it seems as though the class was changed some. Here are my main complaints about this course. 1) Lectures: Lectures often did not go for the full period of time, and the lecture slides are absolutely horrible. The professor clearly spends more time searching the internet for

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾ Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 91 THROUGH 95 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

Although it has a very interesting lecturer, the course material is not always connected to themes discussed that week or to the exams. Additionally, the take home exams are over the weekend (coincidentally over two campus-wide extremely busy extracurricular weekends of Cultural Rhythms and Visitas), and take a fair amount of time to do. There is also very little structured support outside the course for exams (such as availability of TF office hours over the weekend and a study session for the final exam).

If you would like an introduction to the basic foundations of congress, than this is a good course to take.

Many people take this class because it is easy; I think "ridiculously lax" is a more appropriate term. You probably won't remember anything you learned after taking this course. The readings are boring and this class will become "an annoying pest." Not recommended.

This class is a straightforward government class in which you can learn a lot about the way the United States Congress works. However, the discrepancy in grading from the courses TFs and the Professor's indifference to this discrepancy made it a nightmare for a lot of students this year.

I genuinely enjoyed the class - one of my top two at Harvard so far. It will really challenge your assumptions about Congress and the way it works. Professor Platt is a really fun lecturer, and even though there are a lot of readings, most of them are interesting and worth reading anyway.

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Print Page](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 96 THROUGH 100 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

Go to lecture that will give you have a general idea of major schools of thought, models and concepts that Prof Platt wants you to use in the exams. That also helps you see congress in a different light. I personally have a more optimistic outlook b/c now I have a better idea of why it is the way it is and the reasons for and against certain institutional changes that are often recommended. This is a pretty pragmatic gov class for introducing you to the field of political science and helping you understand congress. The workload is doable, just know exams can be intense if you have not gone to lecture and do not know the major points of key readings he emphasizes in class.

Although lectures are not bad, the overall relaxed feeling of the course makes it difficult to stay engaged with the course material outside of class, which makes the class less than worthwhile.

New format is difficult. Exams require a lot of time.

A course that challenges you a little and gets you to learn about Congress. Not much work required until exam time. The exams are vague and can be annoying at times.

Interesting, low workload, exams were somewhat vague, but the grading was fair.

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 96 THROUGH 100 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 101 THROUGH 105 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

Do not take this course unless you have some inherent interest in Congress because the four exams will be literally painful otherwise.

It became much more difficult this year and there was a LOT of general discontent about the grading scale.

This course has interesting reading and interesting lectures. However, the tests are not very clearly written and take longer than expected to complete. If you want to do well, you're going to have to work harder than you might expect.

Do not take this as an easy class. You'll probably do well, but those exams actually require some work and an understanding of the readings. Also, go to lecturer because the lecturer slides are useless without notes.

It's tougher than it was! But go to class, do the readings, and you'll come out with a better understanding of the ins and outs of Congress than you would have thought.

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 101 THROUGH 105 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 106 THROUGH 110 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

Section needs to be streamlined and made mandatory. My TF, Eliza, went through the readings each week one by one and helped us answer generic questions that she thought were important. Other TFs (after going to make-up sections) did not do such. Lectures can be hit or miss, but I liked them on the whole. The exams are fair and straightforward. TAKE THIS CLASS!!

You don't learn as much as you would hope and the exams are incredibly difficult just because the Professor is trying to make a point. The questions are convoluted and they are not satisfying even when the time and effort is put in.

Unless you actually care about how Congress runs, do not take this class. No longer an easy A

Exam questions can be unclear.

If even if you're not a gov't major, you should still take the course because Platt's lectures pertain to everyday life.

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 106 THROUGH 110 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#)[< prev 5](#)**SHOWING RESPONSES 111 THROUGH 115 OF 148**[next 5 >](#)[>](#)

Nothing.

The lectures were interesting and informative. The class is definitely laid back in that it is only take home exams and section was barely held. But, exams were then sufficiently tricky.

there are only 4 take home exams but they were a bit tougher than previous years apparently. looks like they are trying to make it a little more difficult, but still not that much work for the whole semester.

If Platt is still the Professor, I would steer clear.

It's a great class, with a very manageable workload. if you attend lecture and do the readings, you'll learn a lot of interesting information about Congress and American politics.

[<](#)[< prev 5](#)**SHOWING RESPONSES 111 THROUGH 115 OF 148**[next 5 >](#)[>](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 116 THROUGH 120 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

the take-home tests are very time consuming - you need to allocate your entire weekend to getting them done (1-2 full days)

This course was easy in the past -- it became harder this year. Exam questions were intentionally vague and open to different interpretations, so as to trick people into misreading the question and giving a wrong answer. Platt also is extremely unresponsive to emails with any type of question, so don't look to him to clear up the ambiguity on the exams. Lectures are funny and short, and section isn't mandatory, but if you don't do the readings and attend lectures this course will be very rough.

Though this course may not be the cake walk it was in previous years, it is still not very strenuous and also teaches you important things about current events.

The exams are difficult. Keep up with the readings (seriously) and you should be fine. Go to section (even though it's optional) - it's very helpful. Also, record the lectures in Word. Prof. Platt speaks very quickly and having audio is helpful come exam time.

Do not take this course unless you are looking to burden yourself necessarily with a supposed "introductory" course that in reality is not introductory at all

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 116 THROUGH 120 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279 Evaluations: 250 Response Rate: 89.61%

Add to Course Planner

Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 121 THROUGH 125 OF 148

next 5 >

>

DON'T TAKE THIS COURSE. Platt is a horrible professor who uses a rubric for the exams that is impossibly strict. This course is terrible.

its a little more in depth than an introductory course.

This course fulfills the American Government requirement for government. However, a lot of the work must be done on your own

This course was much harder than previous years. Make sure to get a good TF or switch because most of the course is taught in section. Lecture's are very engaging but are difficult to reference back on because most slides just have pictures.

The exams are lengthy and unrelated to lecture material.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 121 THROUGH 125 OF 148

next 5 >

>

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

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Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 126 THROUGH 130 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

The class is interesting, but the exams are not exactly representative of what has been taught in lecture.

Useless class full of esoteric knowledge. Then you get to answer exam questions that are completely irrelevant in the real world.

It's an easy, painless introduction to how and why Congress works the way it does.

Dont take it.

Four take home exams, average lectures.

|<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES 126 THROUGH 130 OF 148

next 5 >

>|

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[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 131 THROUGH 135 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>](#)

This course was intended to be difficult, it seemed, to reverse the reputation of the course as an easy one from last year. Go to lecture.

Hands down the worst class I took at Harvard College. Don't be tricked into thinking this course is a "gem" when it is not. Honestly, the readings have nothing to do with the lectures and the Exams are way to difficult considering it's an introductory course. Don't take this class, you will absolutely regret it in the end. In fact, my TF told me not only that he made it harder on purpose (because everyone was getting A's before I took the course) but he will get suspicious if the TF give too many good grades. So, TF's look for reasons to give you lower score than you other wise would have (For example getting 3 out of 4 on a question you answered completely correct or getting 0/4 on a question you answered half correct). And when a class only has 4 - 50point exams, that proves almost too difficult and too fatal

THIS CLASS IS NOT EASY, and be prepared to have no idea how to do the exam when you see it.

The exams were absurdly difficult. The questions were vague, you were not allowed to ask for help b/c it was a take-home exam, and the questions tested how well you could understand what the professor was asking, not how well you understood the material.

The exams pretty much ask you to find a specific line in some of the readings or remember a specific thing that the Professor said in lecture, which can be kinda tedious. Not terribly well taught.

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012

Change Term

Enrollment: 279

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Course Eval.
SummaryInstructor
Eval. SummaryView Comments
By Question

Print Page

[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES **136** THROUGH **140** OF **148**

next 5 >

>

Unless you have background in government, you will find this class challenging and confusing.

The material featured in this class is interesting if you are like me and find institutional design interesting. However, the lectures are performed too quickly for students to get the full value out of them, and the method of evaluation is entirely unfair due to the fact that the tests are incomprehensible.

Do not take this class. This class takes itself way too seriously. It was pubbed as an "easy A", a way for me to take 5 classes. No. It was not. It has ridiculously hard take-home exams that have nothing to do with lectures (not helped by the fact that lecture slides are useless). When you go to section it's pointless, and the feedback they give you on your papers are next to useless. Only good thing about the class? You only have to stress about it 4 times a semester. But those 4 times you wonder what in the world you're doing there, because you may have learned some stuff about Congress, but whatever you learned has done nothing to prepare you for exams. They throw at you situations you haven't encountered before in such a way that you have to make assumptions about what you should do in a certain situation (not just that you need to think critically, no. Imagine being asked the definition of a word, but you can't find it online. It has Germanic roots but you only were taught Latin ones. And you need to use the definition of the word to answer the question. So you have to assume it means something, and go from there. Oh, you got it wrong? Sucks for you.

Do the readings in a timely fashion and you'll be fine for the exams. Do not procrastinate because the day before the exam is due you will be overwhelmed and perform poorly.

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾ Change Term

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[Add to Course Planner](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[Print Page](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 141 THROUGH 145 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

It is definitely what you make of it. If you keep up with the reading and attend sections, it's a very useful course. Otherwise, you might not get anything out of it.

Take-home exam questions tend to be vaguely worded and are intensely frustrating.

Take it

They have made the course tougher to go against previous claims of this being the "easiest course at harvard"

the exams are unfair and you will only understand the material if you get a good TF, which i did not. plus, sections are optional - so if you go to section expecting to learn, it is extremely disappointing when your TF sucks

[|<](#) [< prev 5](#) **SHOWING RESPONSES 141 THROUGH 145 OF 148** [next 5 >](#) [>|](#)

GOV 1310: Introduction to Congress

Spring Term 2012 ▾

[Change Term](#)

Enrollment: 279

Evaluations: 250

Response Rate: 89.61%

[Add to Course Planner](#)[Print Page](#)[Course Eval.
Summary](#)[Instructor
Eval. Summary](#)[View Comments
By Question](#)[<< Back](#)

▼ What would you like to tell future students about this class?

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES **146** THROUGH **148** OF **148**

next 5 >

>

Not as easy as in the past, still not very hard though. It's actually somewhat interesting, and Platt is a great lecturer.

The grading is largely based on which section TF you have.

The material that is covered is extremely interesting and the professor gives great lectures but the test component can often be confusing.

<

< prev 5

SHOWING RESPONSES **146** THROUGH **148** OF **148**

next 5 >

>